

Theatre

Preview

Cyberbondage

Blast Theory take hostages into virtual space

With his amiable manner and gentle, day-dreamy face, Blast Theory's Matt Adam's doesn't look like an arts-terrorist and it's not something to which he's keen to admit. You can see why. It's 6am and we're off to E17 to indulge in a spot of covert surveillance. Our mission: to snatch a photograph of a certain Martin B. He doesn't know we're coming, we don't know what he looks like: all we've got is his address and some apparently revealing details – he's 5' 6", has brown hair and, er, his ex-girlfriend tortures him as a revenge for infidelity. By 6.45am, we've taken up positions outside Martin's house. As Walthamstow wakes to the world, we sit, wait and watch.

Why? Why indeed. This is the second stage in Blast Theory's 'Kidnap' project, a multimedia 'performance' piece for which the company have invited members of the public to volunteer to be kidnapped. Last week they selected ten people to be put under surveillance – that's what this morning's all about – and on Wed (15) two 'winners' will be taken prisoner in a safe house and filmed interacting with each other for a live broadcast on the internet.

Not most people's idea of a week-end break, perhaps, but over 300 people have paid £10 for a place on Blast Theory's hitlist. They've also coughed up additional sums to spice up their fantasy kidnap with some piquant extras: bedtime stories (£10), being kept naked (£1), continental

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breakfast (£6). A number of entrants have even issued individual pleas to their kidnappers. Many are of the predictable tie-me-up-and-abuse-me variety; others, rather more down to earth: 'If I get cystitis please allow me water and cranberry juice' reads one entrant's special request.

'Kidnap' is a deliberately provocative project that was never going to please the 'is it art?' brigade. But Blast Theory have also attracted more serious criticism. A few weeks ago the Suzy Lamplugh Trust issued a statement to the Press Association condemning the piece as 'sick... a blatant attempt to trivialise kidnap'.

'Not so' says Adams, as we while away the morning on the obligatory park bench. 'What we're doing isn't so different from a straight play about kidnap. That too could upset someone with experience of the real thing. This is a work of fiction; we are pretending to kidnap someone and that person is simultaneously pretending to be kidnapped.'

So why call it 'Kidnap'? 'The fantasy aspect is crucial. Kidnapping comes up again and again in the news, not because we are particularly at risk from it but because it's a sexy story; "Kidnap" is deliberately invoking that. If we'd called it "Awayday Weekends" it wouldn't have tapped into people's



fantasy lives – or all those ideas of celebrity and stardom. We're giving two people the chance to be stars in their very own live show.'

The idea of 'liveness' has always been central to the Blast Theory experience – from their very first promenade performance in 1991, to an explosive piece entitled 'Gunmen Kill Three' in which audience members were offered the chance to shoot a gun at point blank range at a naked cast. 'Kidnap' takes the live element a stage further, inviting a virtual audience to e-

mail the kidnappers as they massage/serve doughnuts to/abuse their prisoners. 'The starting point for the project' says Adams 'was the idea of consent. It's very close to S&M in that

respect. In an S&M situation you are pretending a certain thing, but you can invest in it to such an extent that it becomes real to you. It's the same here. S&M is part of the sexual identities of several of the group: we wanted to explore those ideas of handing over power, and their manifestations at different levels of society. So if, in "Kidnap", people want to be strapped down and beaten, then as far as it's possible within the law, we're open to that. But if they choose a fun and lighthearted '101 Dalmatians' fantasy in which the wicked kidnappers get their comeuppance, yes, we'll do that too.'

Back in Walthamstow there's plenty of time to mull over such matters: boredom, yes, it's part of the piece. An hour crawls by, then another, but Martin's front door remains stubbornly shut. He's gone in seconds when it finally opens: the camera whirs, then the doubts pile up: Did he spot us? Are the shots in focus? Did we get the right bloke? 'Never mind. We'll come back tomorrow' says Adams cheerily as we head towards town. Too many hours on the job, clearly, have taken a toll on his mind. *Kate Stratton*

'Kidnap' takes place on Wed (15): www.newmediacentre.com/kidnap/ A video (£10) is available from Blast Theory (0171 375 0885).

Time Out



sidelines *scoops & snoops*

Ransom notes

It's not too late to be kidnapped. For a mere £10 registration fee, Blast Theory – picked out as one of our top five young theatre groups (TO 1440) – will help you live out your kidnap fantasies, and all without cutting off your ear and mailing it to your loved ones. Entrants can choose from several options, including being kept in your underwear by all-male or all-female kidnappers.

But there's a serious reason for all this, honest. After the notorious Operation Spanner case, the troupe is trying to discover if it is possible to consent to an illegal act against yourself. On June 16, Blast Theory will pick ten entrants at random to be placed under surveillance; on July 15, two targets will be kidnapped and kept in a safe house for 48 hours with their every genuflection monitored and transmitted on a website. The freephone number for registration forms is 0800 174336.

Terry Waite wannabes should also note that there's a £500 reward for escaping from manacles chaining you to your radiator. Though presumably it's extra to be rescued by Phil Cornwell and Ray Trickett breaking down the door in the style of Regan and Carter with Jack shouting 'Shut it, you slags!' and George ending up with a black eye. Sorted, guv.

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Cues

Blasted release

Last Friday morning, at 10.24am, the hostages kidnapped by Blast Theory were released at the ICA. Deborah Burgess, aged 27, and Russell Ward, 19, were bundled out of a white van and delivered to press and photographers waiting on The Mall. Willing prisoners for 48 hours, the kidnappees were initially shy of the attention – despite the fact that their experiences had been continuously scrutinised by curious visitors to the Kidnap Project website. Burgess, an Australian currently temping in London, never suspected that she would be the one that Blast Theory finally snatched. Looking tired and emotional, she said that the experience had been 'draining'. Ward, an assistant in a 24-hour convenience store, was more reserved: 'I think I'm glad I did it' he muttered. A psychologist was on hand throughout the piece, but at the end of the grubby ordeal – a kind of 'Blind Date' under duress – the two 'victims' agreed that the one thing they had craved was a hot flannel. They also revealed that they had swapped e-mail addresses.